

Message Text

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SUBJECT: GALA OPENING OF KABARA-TIMBUKTU CANAL

1. EMBASSY DELEGATION, HEADED BY DCM AND CDO, FLEW TO TIMBUKTU NOVEMBER 15 FOR GALA INAUGURATION OF AID FINANCED REHABILITATION OF KABARA-TIMBUKTU CANAL. A FOOD FOR WORK PROJECT COSTING ABOUT \$70,000, THIS 13 KILOMETER CANAL WAS DUG IN TWO MONTHS BY 400 UNEMPLOYED DROUGHT VICTIMS. THE NEW CANAL FOLLOWED THE TRACE OF AN EARLIER ONE WHICH HAD BEEN IN USE OVER 800 YEARS, DATING BACK TO THE GOLDEN AGE OF TIMBUKTU AS A CENTER OF ART, LEARNING AND RELIGION. WIND-BLOWN SAHARA SAND, HOWEVER, HAD FILLED IT IN DURING THE DEVASTATING 1969-74 DROUGHT, AND HAD CUT TIMBUKTU'S ACCESS TO NIGER RIVER WATER AND TRADE.

2. THE GOVERNOR OF THE SIXTH REGION, CAPTAIN DEMBELE, THE MAYOR, CAPTAIN MARIKO, AND LOCAL NOTABLES TREATED THE DELEGATION TO A GUIDED TOUR OF THE QTE MYSTERIOUS END QTE CITY, TEA ON A SAND DUNE SURROUNDED BY LOCAL DANCE GROUPS AND TUAREG TRIBESMEN ON CAMELS, FOLLOWED BY A TRADITIONAL LAMB DINNER BACK IN THE CITY, DESERT STYLE, IN AN ANCIENT COURTYARD UNDER THE STARS.

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3. THE FOLLOWING DAY, THE DELEGATION AND LOCAL OFFICIALS

BOARDED PIROGUES TO MAKE THE INAUGURAL JOURNEY FROM THE PORT OF KABARA ON A TRIBUTARY OF THE NIGER RIVER THROUGH THE DESERT INTO TIMBUKTU. THE DELEGATION WAS ABLE TO SEE NEW VEGETABLE GARDENS AND WATERING PLACES FOR CATTLE AND CAMELS ALONG THE CANAL, AS WELL AS SOME VERY HAPPY PEOPLE WHO YELLED REPEATEDLY TO THE GOVERNOR THAT THEY WOULD SOON BE UP TO THEIR EARS IN FRESH VEGETABLES. UPON ARRIVAL IN TIMBUKTU A CROWD OF SEVERAL THOUSAND, INCLUDING THE FOUR HUNDRED WORKERS GIVING A RAISED SHOVEL SALUTE, GREETED THE PARTY WITH A WILD DISPLAY OF ENTHUSIASM. THE GOVERNOR, MAYOR AND DCM GAVE SPEECHES FROM A GRANDSTAND BEDECKED WITH U.S. AND MALIAN FLAGS.

4. THE OFFICIAL DAILY, L'ESSOR, ON NOVEMBER 0 , FRONT-PAGE A FAVORABLE ARTICLE EXTOLLING AMERICAN ASSISTANCE IN RESTORING THE ANCIENT CANAL WHICH WOULD DIRECTLY BENEFIT THE PEOPLE OF TIMBUKTU. RADIO MALI ALSO CARRIED THE DCM'S SPEECH IN ITS ENTIRETY AT PRIME TIME.

5. COMMENT: PARTLY BECAUSE OF THE HISTORICAL ASPECT OF RESTORING THIS ANCIENT CANAL, AND PARTLY BECAUSE IT WILL DIRECTLY AFFECT SO MANY OF THE 18,000 INHABITANTS OF THIS FABLED CITY, THIS AID PROJECT HAS CAPTURED THE IMAGINATION OF MALIANS IN AN UNPRECEDENTED WAY.
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